

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976, as amended must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to the Iowa Department for the Blind. Excerpts up to 1000 words from the oral histories may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited. Requests for permission to quote for other publication should be addressed to the Director, Iowa Department for the Blind, 524 Fourth Street, Des Moines, IA 50309. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind. All materials cited must be attributed to the Iowa Blind History Archive at the Iowa Department for the Blind.

**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Cody Dolinsek, Age 30+, Des Moines, IA
Mary Clarke
Iowa Department for the Blind, 524 4th Street
Des Moines, IA 50309
8-26-2011**

Mary Clarke: Today I am interviewing Cody Dolinsek and the date is August 26, 2011. The time is approximately 8:15. We are recording at the Iowa Department for the Blind at

524 4th Street in Des Moines. Cody, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Cody Dolinsek: Absolutely.

Clarke: All right. Cody, going to your early childhood, if you could kind of explain the cause of your blindness, and how your growing up years were.

Dolinsek: Sure. Well, I was born prematurely. I was born in five and one-half months, instead of going the full nine, and I weighed two pounds and three ounces when I was born. The doctors put me in an incubator, you know, to make sure that I had the necessary oxygen, but the oxygen deteriorated my retinas. And so, that's the cause of my blindness. It used to be called retrolental fibroplasia, or RLF was what it was called up until the time I was 18, and it's called RPF now. You know, I can remember right now what the new designation stands for, but it's the same thing.

Clarke: I think it's retinopathy of prematurity.

Dolinsek: Yeah, I guess, yeah. My parents didn't know I was blind at first. They started noticing, of course, though that I didn't respond to visual cues, you know, like most babies will. They took me to Iowa City, and it was confirmed that I was blind, and that did create, I suppose, well, I know that it created some strain. Especially, for my mom, you know, because she wasn't sure then. You know, I was the first born, and you know, my mom was only 20 years old. You know, that's quite a blow at 20, I'm sure. And so, I guess, there was some tension growing up in terms of on the one

hand, my mom wanted me to fit in as well as I could with everybody else. But, then on the other hand, I think she wanted to protect me. I think that there was two things worked in combination with one another because, you know, if I came home and complained about, you know, kids making fun of me at school or treating me differently, she would say, "Well, you know, just stand up for yourself. Don't let anybody, you know, do that to you." Because, I think on the one hand she did really think that I was like everybody else. But, on the other hand, if I wanted to go, say to play basketball on the playground with my cousin and brothers. There was one time when she had me not go with them. And, looking back, that may have been because, you know, maybe they wanted to play alone and not have to worry about helping me with the ball, whatever, or it just could have been she wanted me to stay home, because she didn't want me to...She wanted me to be safe, you know. I'm not really sure what the reason was for that one.

When I was 13, I started to want to do more of the things my brothers did. So, my six-year-old brother had a bike, and by that time he didn't have training wheels on it. And, I decided, you know, I wanted to try my hand at this, you know. It looked fun, and so. And, I would never recommend anybody doing this, but my six-year-old brother and I were out in the street riding this bike. Trying to, you know, trying to figure out, you know, how to be balanced on it. My mom was not happy about that. But, you know, I think that I, too, embodied that tension, because I wanted very much to be considered, you know, I couldn't have articulated this at the time; but I definitely wanted to be considered part of the mainstream and be treated like a normal person. So, I guess that's it.

Clarke: I have a question. When you were going to school earlier, up through 13, did you go to the public school?

Dolinsek: Yes.

Clarke: You went to the public school, okay. And, you learned Braille at that time?

Dolinsek: I started learning Braille...I think I was introduced to the Braille writer when I was in preschool. I went to preschool as well. I started out at Cowles and then went to Smouse, because Cowles closed for a while, as I remember. I don't know why I remember that. Anyway, went to Smouse and I think I learned...I was exposed to what a Braille writer was, although I was just exposed to it. I didn't use it or do anything with it then. But, I started learning Braille when I went to Windsor Elementary. I started learning it about five. When I was growing up, we used the "You Can Do" books.

Clarke: Yes.

Dolinsek: You know, with Pam and Tim, you know. And, then in first grade you get the city and farm. At least, those were the books we used when I was growing up.

Clarke: Right.

Dolinsek: And so, yeah those were the books I used to learn braille. I was not...It's funny, because when I was growing up, at least up until the time I was about nine, I didn't like to read. It was a very slow, tedious process, and it didn't seem

to hold any relevance to what I really enjoyed doing, which was playing with my Masters of the Universe action figures. But, then again, my mom was pretty instrumental in this. She decided one day to take me to the library, here at the Department for the Blind. It was called the Commission for the Blind then. This would have been July of 1985. I came here to the library to sign up for materials, and I was so excited when I found out that the book “Raiders of the Lost Ark” was here, like in Braille. I mean, you know, at that moment, reading became important to me, because it actually corresponded to something that I enjoyed outside of school.

Clarke: Okay.

Dolinsek: Now I admit, at first, because it was...At nine years old you probably shouldn't read “Raiders of the Lost Ark.” It's more of an adult book, or at least, mid to late teenage book. But, I was reading it, because I loved the movie; loved the story line. You know, what young kid doesn't want to be Indiana Jones?

Clarke: Yes.

Dolinsek: You know? And, it was frustrating in some ways because, you know, there were big words and everything like that, but I tried to persevere through it. I found myself getting bored at places, but at least, at that initial time, reading was somehow connected to something I actually enjoyed, which was the first time I discovered that that could actually be the case.

Clarke: Does your father play any role in your early life?

Dolinsek: Yeah. Well, my mom and dad...My mom and dad were together, you know, they were married in 1975, and they...let's see, I'm trying to think more in terms of a role that he did play. I mean, he definitely was around, but as far as my formation, you know, the things that I learned to...how you would appreciate; I really would have to say my mom was more of the instrumental person there. My dad was into sports. I never developed a love for sports. And, you know, I suppose that there are a number of reasons for that.

Clarke: So, you didn't have that close connection with your dad, as you did with your mother?

Dolinsek: No, not as much. I think when I got a little older, when I got to be a teenager, my dad and I tried to connect a little bit more. There was a spot by our house that was kind of like a shady area. I got to be about 14 and interested in girls, and you know, my dad told me that we could go and chat about whatever we wanted at this little shady area, you know, just have some father and son time. And, you know, I took him up on that once. But, yeah, my dad didn't really have a lot to do with those formative years. Well, I should say that though, one thing my dad did do for me. Actually, I think it was more of a collaborative venture; is my dad loved music, and you know we'd usually be playing some kind of music or other. And so, I learned to have an appreciation of mostly classic rock then. My tastes have widened and varied, you know, since then. But, initially, my dad's enthusiasm for, you know, classic rock 'n roll was pretty catching. So, I developed a love for that. So, I don't want to

leave him out completely, I mean, because that became pretty important to me for a while.

Clarke: So, then your high school years, where did you go to high school?

Dolinsek: I went to Hoover High School. Let me back up, because something really important happened along the way through high school that I probably should say something about, because it's helped me think continually about, you know, what it is to be blind, and how I should relate to other people. My mom, when I was little, read to us, you know, bible stories and things like that. So, I mean, I had some general concept of God, and so when I was a teenager, I kind of started doing what a lot of people do. I started to bargain. I said, "God, if I thank you every day for my family stability, I pray that you would keep my family stable." You know, and that was, you know. And then, of course, the trouble would be that I wasn't always faithful to that vow, you know, to that bargain. Then I started going to church with my grandmother, because I thought, well, you know, maybe if I go to church, you know, God will look at that as a good thing and solve my family problems. Obviously, they needed solving. And, in the process, again a very long story; but in the process, I heard what I still consider to be the best news I've ever heard. By the time I reached my teens, I'd done things in my life for which I had some regret. And, I would pray for forgiveness, and pray for a sense of acceptance. I mean, I didn't know anything about Christianity, really. I mean, I'd heard the story that Jesus died on the cross for sins, you know, for my sins, but I had no idea what that meant.

Clarke: You hadn't personalized that.

Dolinsek: Yeah. Well, and I mean, I didn't know how to. There just weren't...You know, my family upbringing, you know, those categories weren't really stressed, and so. But, in the process I started going to church and I started listening to religious radio stations. And I did, I finally heard the gospel, and I mean, to this day, it's still something that is almost too good to be true; that God's forgiveness is free. There's nothing I have to do to earn it, I simply receive it, because of the price paid on the cross. And, that has had for me very important implications for how I see myself, and how I see others, and particularly, how I think about blindness. Because, prior to becoming a Christian, I had a very negative view of people. I mean, let's face it, I sometimes still do.

15:00

Dolinsek: I mean, you know, because I think change is never perfect. It's something you aim at, it's something you hope for.

But, in any case, before becoming a Christian, I was very obsessed with being popular and being well-liked, and I wasn't. I mean, I had people, you know, I kind of hung with, but I mean, they weren't overly close friends or anything. And, when I became a Christian, I started realizing that there were more important things than being accepted by one's peers; as important as that is. And, this has, you know, come in stages, because I now understand that, you know, the most important thing is not, you know, laboring to

be accepted by one's peers, but you know, learning how to love one's peers. And, even if you don't always feel they accept what you would like, that's no excuse for you not to still treat people with respect and dignity. You know, the same way that you would want to be treated. And, that's actually worked. You know, because when you are friendly to other people, then people naturally want to be friendly back. So, it's kind of one of those nice things that you, that I learned.

So, as far as high school goes, when I got into high school, I still, you know, for all my talk about, you know, realizing there were more important things than being accepted, I still wanted friends; especially girls, you know. Because I'd gotten to an age when that was important to me, and I saw other people, you know, with relationships, however flawed and phony some of those relationships might have been. You know, and I really wanted that. I didn't really have a lot of that in high school. I kind of resolved that I would just be friends with everybody, you know. So, people said "Hi" to me in the hall. I was always polite. When people sat with me, I talked to them, but I found it difficult to go out of my way to make friends. It was hard.

One of the things that I had; a teacher from the time I was in fourth grade, until the time I graduated from high school. You know, they were called Itinerant Teachers, and she actually forced me to talk to the girl sitting next to me in my science class. And, she said what I want you to do is talk about anything, except for your religion and blindness. Talk about your class, talk about the weather, just try to get a conversation going. And, it was terrifying. I mean, number one, this person was a girl; and two, the idea that I would

just start up a conversation, and it wasn't as if I never did that. It was just that it was an exercise in, I guess, being more self-conscious, I suppose. And, that was really...I did it, you know, but it wasn't easy.

Clarke: Would you say you were more of an introvert at that time?

Dolinsek: Yeah.

Clarke: And so, sometimes that's hard to reach out and become more of an extrovert.

Dolinsek: It is. And, you know, I think that I've gotten better at it. But, I still, I think, by and large, I think that I'm more of an introverted person. I tend to process things more and tend to sometimes be over-analytical. You know, there are just certain things you never get over.

Clarke: That's all right.

Dolinsek: I'm trying to think more. My last year of high school things started to click a little bit more with me in terms of having to think more about my blindness. The summer before my senior year, I went to what's called the Orientation to the World of Work Program that the Department for the Blind and Vinton collaborated on. And, I was part of the pilot program in the summer of 1994. And, it was the first job I ever had, working. I worked two part-time jobs while I was there. It was in Cedar Falls, and we were based out of the Roth Complex at UNI. And, it was really quite an eye-opening experience, because I learned there for

the first time about cooking. Because, you know, you have to understand, I mean, well, you would understand this. Because having grown up here in Des Moines, the Department for the Blind was always around. I mean, I always knew about it. It's hard not to know about it, you know, living here and being a blind person. So, I'd always known that people came here and learned how to cook, learned how to do different things. But, you know, it's one thing to know something and it's another thing to experience it for yourself.

And so, being in Cedar Falls that first summer learning, you know about cooking, and folding laundry, about having a job, you know. I worked at a place called The Brown Bottle. And, there I did food prep in the mornings, you know. And then, in the afternoons; these were Monday, Wednesday and Friday things, both of them. In the afternoons, I worked at Pizza Hut washing dishes, you know. It was just, I think that figuring out for the first time that I actually could. And, I was 18 by this time, you know. So, there was a lot of catching up to do.

But, learning for the first time that I could do these things, it started to make me wonder about what I'd been missing out on, you know. And so, then I got back here and I started getting more restless. Because I thought, you know, if I did that in Cedar Falls, why shouldn't I...and, you know, I had my teacher, her name was Judy Deutch. She prodded me on which, I mean, I can't say enough good about her. She did a lot of very good things. She kind of, and I don't know how conscious she did this. I suppose there was probably some self-consciousness on her part, in the good sense of self-consciousness. I think she self-consciously tried to teach me, you know, more responsibility, things like

that. Things that, you know, by the time I got to be in my mid-teens, my family structure had pretty well deteriorated. And so, there were a lot of things that I think she, you know, helped me through without ever saying anything. Anyway, she prodded me on to look for work. So, I ended up getting my first job in February of 1995, working at a Pizza Hut washing dishes my last year in high school. And, you know, it was one of the moments, where I felt like, you know what? I'm actually doing something that a lot of my peers have been doing for a long time. You know, working a part-time job and actually making a little money. It was really exhilarating. And, I also found at this time I was getting up the nerve to call some girls that I actually liked, and you know, just chat with them over the phone. You know, they were small steps, but they were steps.

And, as I got to thinking more about being blind, one of the things that started to occur to me is that, you know, I really don't...And, you know, we'll talk more about the Orientation Center, of course. But, before I came, I'd already started to think to myself, you know, there really isn't any reason why I should have to prove anything to anyone. I am created in the image of God. I'm also redeemed in Christ, you know. Those were the underpinnings of the way that I thought. And, I thought, you know, if these things are true; which, you know, I believed then, you know, and still believe. Even though as faith is, you know, there are moments of doubting and wavering. I mean, at least for me there have been. But, I had that basic structure, you know, and I think that having a job, and you know, making friends no matter how casual those friendships might have been. You know, they were things that were starting to point me in a different direction.

Clarke: So, then after high school what did you do?

Dolinsek: Well, throughout high school I had thought that, maybe, I wanted to, you know, go to college; especially seminary. You know, being in the ministry was really kind of where my passion was at the time. But, there were no prospects. I hadn't applied anywhere to go to college, and it was March of 1995, and I was graduating in May. And, I thought, you know, I don't have anything to do over the summer. Well, I'll give the Orientation Center a go. You know, I was kind of proud and arrogant. I could be arrogant then, you know. And, I thought, well, you know, I don't have anything better to do. So, and I could definitely use some brushing up. Well, not just brushing up. I mean, it would be nice to learn how to travel, and it would be nice to learn how to, you know, get better at cooking. But, as you can tell, you know, I was very skills oriented. Because, you know, I thought I had all the attitude down, you know. And, in some ways I did; I think I did.

But anyway, during that time, backing up to high school a little bit, I had a person who came once a week to do mobility with me. And, I wanted to get to a point where I could travel alone by bus to Merle Hay Mall. I was living on the East side here, and I thought that that would be a fun thing to learn how to do. And, one day I did it. I got lost, you know, and everything else coming back. And, got disoriented in terms of where I needed to cross the street. I think I might have even almost gotten hit, you know, but that's not unlike...I mean, even to this day, I'm probably not the best traveler in the world. Although, I think I have the basic skills and I do okay. But, so after high school, then I

came here to the Orientation Center. And like I said, I think I was kind of arrogant.

I remember being in Rebecca Swainey's class, and saying, you know, "I really don't understand why I need to learn to use a slate and stylus. I did this all through high school. There's really no need for me to do this. You know, I've done it. I know it." And, of course, she said, "Well, okay, prove it." And, in a roundabout way she said go ahead and write something for me. And, of course, I wrote it and made a ton of mistakes, and so, you know, that's where I had to put my foot in my mouth a little bit. But, I think that I had the basic structure down in terms of how the attitude was supposed to work, but I still hadn't figured out about how to put some of that into practice.

And actually, Mary, I remember it was actually one afternoon after, I think, after Braille class. I think either I came into your office, or you asked to see me. I don't even remember what I was doing in your office, but I remember we had a conversation. And, you told me, "You know, Cody, I think that you have an understanding of blindness in your head, but it hasn't reached your heart yet. You have head knowledge, but not heart knowledge." Do you remember that?

Clarke: Yes, I do.

Dolinsek: And, of course, at the time I was angry, because how dare you challenge me this way, you know. But, you know, anger can be a very good emotion. Because, it can actually lead you to reevaluate and to make change. And, I think there was some truth, you know, in what you said. I think I was on the way to getting it, but, you know, that little

push made me work harder, I think, to really try; because I remember what you said. You said, “Basically, Cody, what you want to get out of this place is, you want to be in a situation where you know if you had to go to Chicago tomorrow to a meeting, that you would be able to do that without worrying about all of the details.” Something to that effect. That you would be able to do it without problems. And, you know, because that got me thinking, and I thought to myself, well, you know, if that’s what it’s about, then I’m not there; and I knew that. I knew that I still had a ways to go.

So, I ended up staying a lot longer than the summer. I had ulterior motives for that. I met Bettina here and...Well, I didn’t really actually meet her here, but I got to know her really well here and we became best friends. And, I don’t know how consciously I managed to, you know, I out-stayed her by a week, you know. Because the thought of getting out of the Center before she did was just torture, you know. But, love makes you do crazy things.

But anyway, as time went on...because another area I didn’t understand and had to learn was shop. I think a lot of people struggle with that. It’s like, I’m never going to be in woodworking, you know. So, why should I have to learn how to make a picture frame? And, it wasn’t until later that I started understanding that the purpose of shop is not to turn you into a wood worker; it’s to give you the confidence that you need maybe in other areas. You know, it’s more like, if I can do that, then maybe I can do this.

Clarke: Right.

Dolinsek: And, you know, I think I did eventually learn that. I'm trying to think here of some other things that, maybe, I should talk about.

30:00

Clarke: When you were getting ready to leave the Orientation Center, did you have in mind then a plan for your future?

Dolinsek: Yes and no. When I originally left, I really...at that point I didn't really know what I was going to do. I still wanted to do ministry, but you know, again, college was not...well, let me back up. When I left I went back home to live with my mom and dad, we were all living with my grandmother by this time. And, there were two things I knew I needed to do. I knew that one of them was that I wanted to get a job. I wanted to start making some money. I didn't just want to sit at home. But, that is what I was doing for the first couple of weeks.

And, I was going to a church at the time, where one of the families actually volunteered to let me come and live with them and help me, you know, in the process of...It was one of the best things that ever happened to me. Because quite honestly, if they had they not stepped in, you know, you never know what would happen without being connected with certain people in certain situations. I think I was very lucky, because I think, you know, given my own propensity to sometimes be indecisive and to be a bit; you know, I still have moments when I'm rather unsure of myself. I think given those tendencies, it could have been easy for me to have just kind of settled and not really done much.

You know, I don't know. But in any case, there were people who intervened, let me come live with them. The one thing they didn't do...The one thing they did, that I look back now and think was a complete mistake, was they talked me out of starting DMACC in the fall of 1996. I didn't know what I wanted to do at that point.

Clarke: Why did they talk you out of going to DMACC?

Dolinsek: They thought that I should be more sure about what I wanted to pursue. And, they thought that going there would be a waste of time, unless I had a practical goal. I mean, I know that that was a bunch of hog wash. You know, but we had the pastor of this particular church was a very domineering figure, and he sided with them, you know, he didn't try to talk them out of talking me out of that. And, you know, unfortunately, you know, I listened to them. And, I didn't go. I got a job instead. I mean, that was fine. I started working at the cab company, and, you know, there's nothing wrong with working, obviously. But, one nice thing would have been to have gone on and started my educational endeavors before getting married. And, that's one thing I wish I had done differently. I think they talked me out of it, too, because their understanding of education was a bit more narrow than mine. I think they were under the impression that, you know, if I went off to college and started reading secular psychology and philosophy and this and that, that I would, you know, lose my faith, and that I'd be wasting my time with a bunch of stuff that really was irrelevant. I mean, again, you understand that those were views that, I didn't really hold them then either. Although, I

probably did more than I do now, because now I mean, I look back at that and I think to myself that is stupid.

But in any case, what was good in one way was bad in another, because, you know, I was 20 years old by this time. And, I really ought to have been given more leeway to make some of those decisions for myself. I really, kind of, wasn't. But, I continued to work at the cab company and got to know Tina better, and we were married in December of 1997, and I moved out to West Des Moines. I was living downtown in my own apartment by this time. Because then after we got married, I moved out there, and have been out there ever since.

Clarke: Then, you quit the cab company I would imagine. And, what did you do after that?

Dolinsek: Well, after we got married, we both started working at a place called Neodata, is what it was called at the time, but it changed its name to Centro, and it's now called EDS. They used to be on 10th and Mulberry, and now they're out by the airport somewhere. And, we worked there selling coffee, you know. And, in the meantime, I started making plans to go off to college, because I decided, you know, I do want to pursue the ministry, and I want to begin getting an education.

In the process of all this, I had read a book that really changed the way I thought about a lot of things, and that book was called, "The Closing of the American Mind." Books have always played a pivotal role in my life. Different times in my life, different books have influenced me. And so, I guess it's hard for me to talk about, you know, how I think and how I feel about things without making reference to

some book or other. And, this one basically talked about, you know, what the purpose of the university was. You know, that it was to inform the mind on the basis of, you know, permanent questions that people ask about, you know, the meaning of life, is it better to be free, is it better to be under the control of somebody. And basically, the way this book talked about it was approaching this through the study of classic texts like Plato's "Republic" and De Tocqueville's "Democracy in America." And, at this point in my life, I had never really...The only thing I knew about philosophy was that it was bad, and that it couldn't really, you know, the only reason why you ever would study it is to refute it. So, I read this book, and that made me start rethinking all of that. Because, and then I started reading philosophy and started finding that there were things that resonated with me that made sense; that I couldn't just wave away because I was a Christian.

And, that had had a lifelong impact on me, in the sense that I started school, and I started taking, you know, I took as many philosophy classes as I could. I started taking literature classes. Things, you know, that didn't interest me in high school all of a sudden became extremely fascinating for me. So, you know, I developed what now is a 13-year relationship with Shakespeare, with Plato. Granted, you know, some of those things I haven't read for quite a while now, because I haven't had time, but you know, they influence the way I think about a lot of things. And so, that was again, a piece of, I guess you could say, good luck. You know, because I think a lot of what we do, a lot of how we think is determined by the, you know, the people we're around and the books we happen to read. And you know, I

just...I feel that I was very fortunate to have certain people in my life, and certain books in my life at just the right time.

Well, anyway, I started taking all these classes. And, one of the things that happened to me is in the process I started to feel like ministry would be wonderful. But, being in the academic world could equally be quite satisfying. And, that troubled me in some ways, because I thought, you know, if I'm really being called to the ministry, then you know, would I be forsaking the ministry if I pursued this other equally satisfying opportunity. And, I mean, I don't think so now. I'm kind of at the point now where I think that, either way, whatever I end up doing, I'll be satisfied with it. My training will help me in whatever it is I'll be doing, so I'm kind of open. So, let's see.

Clarke: So, do you have a degree then, yet?

Dolinsek: I have a BA from Drake University in philosophy.

Clarke: Okay.

Dolinsek: And then, I have a Master of Divinity from Faith Baptist Theological Seminary in Ankeny; Master of Divinity.

Clarke: Okay.

Dolinsek: And, I'm in the process now of, you know, thinking about different options; pursuing a Ph.D., it'll probably end up being in theology. So, I'll likely be teaching at a seminary somewhere, or maybe pastoring. I've decided that I'm not really going to overly worry about the job prospects at the moment, because what I've found is that, you know, just by

taking opportunities as they come, that's actually given me more opportunities to teach, right now, on a voluntary basis. But, especially if I end up doing the Ph.D. program, somewhere then there will be teaching opportunities. So, again, I would already be in something that I enjoy.

Clarke: Now, also you are working part-time while you're doing all of this, right?

Dolinsek: Yeah. Well, when I went to Drake, I actually worked full-time the entire time. When I was pursuing my undergrad degree. And, I'll say a little bit about that.

I think that there are a lot of people, nobody here at the department, of course. But, there are a lot of people in society, who think that if you're blind or you have a disability, then you're justified in collecting SSDI and SSI, you know, whatever kind of benefit you might happen to be on. And I've decided, you know, that there are times when it's okay to take advantage of that. I mean, if it's there, then use it. That's kind of how I've started to look at that. But, initially I had it in my head. And, I mean, this is still largely true; that if I can work, then I should work. I mean, there's no, I mean, I'm not going to make excuses for myself. Yeah, if I have to learn how to do things differently, there are some things that I might have to just acknowledge and say, you know, based on certain limitations, blindness or other types of limitations, I might not be able to do, you know, A or B or whatever. So, that was kind of what motivated me to keep working while I was in school, because I mean, most people work while they're in school. So, why not me? Plus, I was married, and that played a huge part in determining that I would continue to work, because I didn't feel like it was

right for Tina to hold down a full-time job and me just to go to school.

So, but then when I went to graduate school, things kind of changed in the sense that I was working at...I've had several jobs. I've worked for a while at Centro, I then worked for Sears for five years, and then they closed, and I went to work at Principal. And, that job was lost due to technological issues that couldn't be resolved. And, then I worked for Qwest in sales, and that job unfortunately was lost, because I just wasn't good at sales. But, in the process of all that, I ended up getting into Faith. So, for the first year of my graduate studies, I didn't actually work. I just went to school, and that's when I got on SSDI. And, then I found a job at Nationwide about a year after that; started working there full-time for a while, and then part-time. And, then when I worked part-time as I am now, then I have the SSDI, because I figure, you know, I'm going to school. The work wasn't all that challenging in terms of school, but there was a lot more of it. There was constantly something to be read or something to be written or turned in. So, yeah, I've worked my entire time through school.

Clarke: Oh, I wanted you to tell a little about...I understand that you and Bettina bought a house.

Dolinsek: Yes.

Clarke: Tell about the process you went through there, because I believe that you are living in an area that...Do you have transportation in that area? I mean, like public transportation?

Dolinsek: Not directly.

Clarke: Okay. So, that always fascinated me. Because always in my own life, I've always looked at, okay, where's the public transportation? And, then I bought a house, or we bought a house that accommodated that, you know.

45:00

Dolinsek: Well, we bought our first house in 2004, and that was close to like an express bus that goes, you know, from West Des Moines, to downtown. And, but we started...We felt like the place we had bought was too small, so we wanted to look for something a little bit bigger. And, we called the...Basically, we ended up building the house we're currently living in. It hadn't been built yet. So, we found the plot that we wanted. We called the West Des Moines, or called the DART and, I still want to say MTA, you know. And so, we called them and they told us that there would be transportation out there, you know, so we went ahead with it.

Well then, once we, you know, moved out there and settled in; this would have been December 2006, I called them up and asked them where the bus was. And, like, oh the closest the bus comes is to 74th Street, you know, by the mall at Jordan Creek Parkway. And, I'm like, you've gotta be kidding. Because, you know, that's 25 blocks away from where we live, you know. And so, if you're going to walk to that, you've got to get up really early, and you know, who wants to do that. Well, it actually ended up working out, because there is an on-call bus now, a West Des Moines on-call, that if you need it they'll come for you. So, you know, I

usually make arrangements with them. That's not always been easy, because sometimes the drivers aren't very friendly, and sometimes they're late. And, sometimes if you're going home especially, they might leave you on the bus for, you know, 45 minutes while they pick up other people, so you're waiting to, you know, get to your house. I mean, it's nice to have that door-to-door service, but the downside is that you wait a lot longer to get home than you would if you either, you know, drove a car or took an express bus to a place closer to town.

Clarke: Right.

Dolinsek: Another thing that I've done is we've had, you know, paid drivers. For a while there, I paid a driver to get to work. It was on her way, but you know, I've always felt that like if someone's giving me a ride, even if it is on the way, I should contribute to the gas, because that seems fair.

Clarke: Right.

Dolinsek: You know, so we've had to shell out money for drivers more than we used to. The upside of that, of course, is that you end up making new friends, and you end up kind of widening your circle of influence, as well as being influenced by others. So, I mean that's a positive. The negative side, of course, is that you sometimes, I mean Tina and I have sometimes felt like we've spent more money on transportation than we do on anything else. And, we're actually thinking, maybe, of selling the house, if we even can do that, and moving downtown. Especially, if I go off for

a Ph.D. program, it would be nice to not have that hanging over our heads.

Clarke: Right. So, if you go for a Ph.D. program, do you have an idea of where you'd like to go?

Dolinsek: Well, there's a seminary in Dallas, TX called Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and they're actually considering me for a Ph.D. program. Back in May I had given a talk at Faith, here in Ankeny, where I was going just before I graduated on, you know, Christianity and disabilities. I focused on blindness, of course, because basically what I wanted to talk about...What had happened was, the President of Faith here in Ankeny said, "I just got a call from someone, and she's complaining about the fact that, you know, often in our churches she feels marginalized as a person." I think this person is in a wheelchair or something. And, she said that she feels more like a charity case than like a contributing member. And, of course, I can relate to that. I mean, there are times that I have felt that way, too. And, it's understandable, but it's not excusable; but it's understandable, given the New Testament depictions of blind people, sitting by the road and begging, and so on, you know. Jesus heals them and gives them a more fruitful life, and so Christians naturally want to imitate Jesus. Of course, Jesus never healed people and made them feel inferior to him, which is, I think, the difference. I think that a lot of times, people in the name of compassion have a way of exuding their superiority. I don't know if you've ever felt that way.

But anyway, I gave this talk and I talked about not knowing what those without disabilities owed to those with

disabilities, and vice versa. Because it is a two-way street. It would be very easy for me, for example, to decide, well you know, people stink, I don't want to deal with them anymore, so I'm just going to hide in my little cocoon. But, if you really love people, you can't really do that. And, if you want to work for change, you really can't do that. And since I think I have obligations to people without disabilities; then I have to think through, you know, what is my faith practically suggest or demand of me, in terms of loving other people?

Anyway, I gave this talk, and to make a long story short, too late, right? I forwarded it on to a friend, who lives in Florida, during the winter, who in turn forwarded it on to her pastor, who happens to be on the Board of Southwestern Seminary. And, he forwarded it on to the President of Southwestern, and the President said, "I'd like to meet with this person sooner rather than later and talk about, you know, Ph.D. possibilities," which was strange to me. You know, nobody has ever pursued me academically. I've always pursued them, which is the way it usually works. But, you know, sometimes you hear about this from time to time in the history of academia, where somebody is simply offered a place at an institution based on their character or based on, you know, a five minute first impression. I mean, you hear stories like that from time to time. Not so much now, but you know, you used to be able to get into institutions just because of who you were or the people you knew. So, I mean, it will be interesting to see how this plays out.

Clarke: Anything else you want to add to this?

Dolinsek: You know, I guess if I had to narrow everything down to a few key things, I'd say that a couple of things that I've learned that are really important to me are: number one, as a blind person, not to take myself so seriously. One of the things that you learn here is that attitude is important. You know, that attitude actually underlies skills. Sometimes I think there's a tendency though to treat attitude as the only thing that matters. And, I think that's a mistake.

Clarke: I agree, because I think that attitude and skills have to go hand-in-hand.

Dolinsek: Yeah. I mean if you have crappy skills, then that is going to, in turn, reinforce the way you think and feel about yourself. I mean, we can all improve. Like I told you, my travel skills aren't the best. I don't think I lack them, but I mean they could be honed. They could be better. But, you know, I think sometimes through in our attempt to have the right attitude, have the right skills set, it can lead to a lot of needless self-criticism and self-evaluation. And, I think what I would want to shoot for in my own life is to think of myself a lot less and try to think of others more. And, that's hard to do, because given that we are kind of, we're in a minority cross section of society, there is a tendency to, I think make too much of that. To be so focused on my needs, you know, my interests as a blind person that I forget I'm actually part of a larger community where there is more than just me and my own, you know, little space.

So, that's one thing I'd say, you know, not to take myself so seriously, you know, to be willing to joke, even about my disability. I mean, I think that people respond a lot more to you with humor and with, you know, with courtesy

than they do if you're constantly walking around, you know, for lack of a better way of putting this, you know, navel-gazing. Am I living up to my own expectations? I mean, I don't think we ever completely live up to our expectations. What I mean, I don't think that's a reason for constantly being down. And, I don't know, I guess, maybe that's probably it. That kind of sums up the way I try to approach most things.

Clarke: Okay, thank you very much.

Dolinsek: Yeah.

Clarke: This has been very, very interesting.

Dolinsek: Well, you're welcome.

55:25

(End of Interview)

Jo Ann Slayton

9-26-2011